

Message Text

SECRET

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ACTION SS-25

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 /026 W
-----004077 081811Z /42

O 081619Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5539
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
AMEMBASSY BEIRUT IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY CAIRO IMMEDIATE
AMCONSUL JERUSALEM
AMEMBASSY JIDDA IMMEDIATE
AMEMBASSY KUWAIT
AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV IMMEDIATE
USMISSION USUN

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 6962

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PBOR, MILI, MOPS, LE, IS, SY, PLO
SUBJ: SOUTH LEBANON: SARKIS VISIT TO SYRIA

REF: STATE 266581, (B) BEIRUT 5564

1. SUMMARY:

KHADDAM CONFIRMS THAT ASSAD COMMITTED SELF TO SARKIS
TO MAKE MAJOR PERSONAL EFFORT EVERCOME PRESENT IMPASSE
IN IMPLEMENTATION SHTAURA AGREEMENT. ASSAD IS CONVOKING
PLO EXCOM AS WELL AS OTHER PALESTINIAN LEADERS. KHADDAM
REFERRED TO PARTICULARE PORBLEM SARKIS IS EXPERIENCING
WITH LEADERSHIP OF CHRISTIAN MILITIAS ALONG BORDER.
END SUMMARY

2. MET WITH KHADDAM AFTERNOON NOV 8 FOR DISCUSSION SARKIS
VISIT AND SOUTH LEBANON. DREW OJTTALKING POINTS STATE
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REFTEL, LEADING OFF WITH STATEMENT THAT WE WERE CONCERNED
AT APPARENT DEGENERATION OF SITUATION ON BOTH POLITICAL
AND SECURITY FRONTS IN LEBANON. REFERRED TO WEEKEND
EXCHANGES OF FIRE AND ROCKET ATTACKS ON NAHARIYA WHICH
ACCORDING ISRAELI RADIO HAD BEEN REPEATED THIS MORNING.
EMPHASIZED THAT WE HAVE BEEN UP TO NOW ABLE TO PERSUADE
ISRAELIS TO BE PATIENT BUT, AS I HAD ON PAST OCCASIONS

CAUTIONED KHADDAM, THERE IS A LIMIT TO WHAT IS
REALISTICALLY POSSIBLE FOR US ALL TO EXPECT IN THIS REGARD.

3. KHADDAM MADE NO DIRECT REPLY RE POTENTIAL
ISRAELI REACTION. HE CONFIRMED THAT PRINCIPAL PURPOSE OF
SARKIS' VISIT TO DAMASCUS HAD BEEN TO DISCUSS THE PROBLEM
OF SOUTH LEBANON. SAID ASSAD PROMISED SARKIS THAT HE
WOULD PERSONALLY MAKE INCREASED EFFORT TO RESOLVE THE
PRESENT IMPASSE. ASSAD HAS ASKED ARAFAT TO COM SOONEST
TO DAMASCUS FOR MEETING, TOGETHER WITH THE REST
OF THE PLO EXCOM. (ARAFAT IS PRESENTLY IN CARIOR AND CANNOT
ARRIVE DAMASCUS UNTIL NOV 9.) IN THE MEANTIME,
SALAH KHALAF HAS ALREADY ARRIVED AND WILL BE SEEING BOTH
ASSAD AND KHADDAM. ASSAD HAS ALSO SUMMONED TO DAMASCUS OTHER
PALESTINIAN LEADERS, BEYOND THOSE REPRESENTED ON THE PLO
EXCOM.

4. I OBSERVED THAT WITH THE GOL FINALLY HAVING ORGANIZED
ITSELF MILITARILY AND CONTINUING TO ENJOY SYRIAN SUPPORT,
WITH ISRAEL ACTING MORE RESPONSIBLY AND WITH THE
LEBANESE CHRISTIANS GENERALLY SUPPORTING SARKIS, IT SEEMED
TO US THAT IS WAS THE PALESTINIANS WHO HAD CAUSED THE LATEST
PROBLEM. KHADDAM SAID HE DID NOT REJECT THIS INTERPRETATION
BUT NOTED HE HAD NO SPECIFIC INFORMATION TO SHARE WITH ME
TODAY; FOR THE PAST 10 DAYS--GIVEN HIS TRAVELS OUT OF SYRIA
AND THE UNINTERRUPTED SERIES OF OFFICIAL VISITORS HE HAD BEEN
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RECEIVING HERE--HE HAS HAD NO CONTACT WITH THE PALESTINIAN
LEADERSHIP.

5. KHADDAM NOTED THAT SARKIS HAD ASSURED THE SYRIANS HE
HAD NO HESITATION ABOUT SENDING REGULAR LEBANESE TROOPS TO
THE SOUTH. HOWEVER, DURING THE ASSAD-SARKIS CONVERSATIONS
IT HAD EMERGED THAT ONE OF THE MAIN PROBLEMS FACING SARKIS
WAS THAT POSED BY LEADERS OF THE CHRISTIAN MILITIAS ALONG
THE BORDER. "THEY ARE SHOWING NO RESPECT FOR LEGITIMACY OF
SARKIS' LEADERSHIP."

6. I THEN TRIED OUT ON KHADDAM SOME POSSIBLE EXPLANATIONS
FOR PRESENT IMPASSE AS SKETCHED OUT BE EMBASSY BEIRUT
(RARA 2, BEIRUT 5539). KHADDAM TERMED FIRST THREE THEORIES
INVALID. THE PALESTINIANS FROM THE BEGINNING DID INTEND TO
IMPLEMENT SHTAURA. BOTH THE GOL AND PLO EXPECTED TO IMPLE-
MENT THE AGREEMENT TO THE LETTER. IT IS INCORRECT TO
THEORIZE THAT THE SHTAURA AGREEMENT WAS SO VAGUE AND IMCOMPLETE
AS TO CAUSE DISAGREEMENT.

7. BEING UNSURE HOW MUCH LEBANESE MAY HAVE SHARED WITH
SYRIANS RE ISREALI AND CHRISTIAN POST-SHTAURA CONDITIONS,

I DID NOT CITE PARA (D) OF BEIRUT 5539 IN DETAIL BUT ASKED
KHADDAM IF HE THOUGHT PROBLEM MIGHT COME DOWN TO PLO
CONCERN IT WAS BEING ASKED TO ABANDON ITS LAST "FRONT."
PERHAPS, IS SUGGESTED, ANXIETY ON THIS SCORE HAD PROMPTED
ARAFAT'S NOV 6 SPEECH. HE DISMISSED THIS, NOTING THAT IN
FIRST PLACE PALESTINIANS WERE UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO LEAVE
SOUTH LEBANON ALTOGETHER. THEIR OBLIGATION UNDER
CAIRO ACCORD WAS TO MOVE INTO CERTAIN AREAS IN
SOUTH LEBANON. HE THEN INDULGED IN A BIT OF RHETORIC
SAYING THAT IN SECOND PLACE THE "WAR AGAINST ISRAEL WAS NOT A
MATTER OF A SINGLE FRONTIER. WAR IN THE PAST HAD BEEN
FOUGHT FROM SYRIA, JORDAN AND EGYPT. IN THE FUTURE THIS
WOULD APPLY AGAIN AND EVEN INCLUDE SAUDI ARABIA." (IN
SEPARATE CONVERSATION MORNING NOV 8 FROM MINISTRY DIRECTOR
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OF ARAB AFFAIRS, AL-QUTUB, TOLD POLOFF THAT SARG FRANKLY
DID NOT KNOW JUST WHY ARAFAT HAD MADE HIS NOV 6 STATEMENT
REJECTING PALESTINIAN WITHDRAWAL IN THE SOUTH.)

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ACTION SS-25

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-----004158 081823Z /42

O 081619Z NOV 77
FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 5540
INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN
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8. I NOTED ARAFAT'S NOV 6 SPEECH HAD STRESSED UNITY OF

PALESTINIAN AND LEBANESE LEFTISTS. SAID THIS STANCE MIGHT NOT ONLY PREVENT EARLY STABILIZATION OF CONDITIONS IN SOUTH, BUT ALSO BE GROUNDS FOR FURTHER CHALLENGE TO LEGITIMACY OF LEBANESE GOVERNMENT, WITH OBVIOUS NEGATIVE IMPLICATION FOR AREA STABILITY. KHADDAM REPLIED WE SHOULD REVIEW ARAFAT'S SPEECH AS PRINTED IN THE LEBANESE PRESS. ARAFAT HAD SAID HE WOULD NOT WITHDRAW NORTH OF THE LITANI RIVER. HE UNDER NO OBLIGATION TO DO SO AND THAT SPEECH HAD BEEN PROVOKED BY A CHALLENGE (UNSPECIFIED) FROM MAJOR HAZDAD. WITHOUT ELABORATION, KHADDAM ADDED THAT HADDAD HAD PULLED A SURPRISE OF HIS OWN IN REJECTING "LEBANESE ARMY DECISIONS." KHADDAM EMPHASIZED IN CONCLUSION THAT BOTH SYRIAN AND LEBANESE AUTHORITIES WERE DETERMINED TO OVERCOME THE PRESENT IMPASSE AND "WE WILL GET POSITIVE RESULTS."

9. TOLD KHADDAM THAT I MIGHT WANT TO SEE HIM AGAIN CONCERNING DEVELOPMENTS AFFECTING SOUTH LEBANON IN NEXT DAY OR
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TWO. HE SAID HE WOULD WELCOME A FURTHER EXCHANGE AT ANY TIME.

10. COMMENT: IT NOTEWORTHY THAT KHADDAM DID NOT, AS IS SO OFTEN HIS TENDENCY, DISCUSS PROBLEM IN SOUTH AS JUST RESULT OF ISRAELI PROVOCATION. THRUST OF KHADDAM'S PRESENTATION IS THAT SYRIA CONTINUES SEE FULL IMPLEMENTATION OF SHTAURA AGREEMENT TO BE IN ITS BEST INTERESTS. HIS COMMENTS ECHO THOSE MADE BY ASSAD HIMSELF TO THE LEBANESE PRESS DELEGATION ACCOMPANYING SARKIS IN WHICH ASSAD ASSERTED ALL PARTIES WERE ANXIOUS TO IMPLEMENT THE AGREEMENT AND THAT SYRIA DID NOT LINK SITUATION IN SOUTH TO THE GENERAL MIDDLE EAST CRISIS.

11. I DOUBT WE WILL GET MORE SPECIFIC INFORMATION FROM SYRIAN LEADERSHIP UNTIL AFTER ASSAD HAS MET WITH ARAFAT, KHALAF AND OTHER PALESTINIAN LEADERS. ADVISE IF THERE ARE ANY SPECIFIC POINTS DEPARTMENT WISHES ME TO MAKE TO KHADDAM IN INTERIM.
MURPHY

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